

Lesson 15

BREAK THE BEAT PRACTICE METHOD

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Break-the-Beat Practice Method

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Introduction to Part 2 and Lesson 15

You are about to study Lesson 15.

This also marks the beginning of Part 2, so let's pause a moment to take a look at the big picture.

This diagram shows all the Parts that make up Book 3. We're just starting Part 2.

PART 10: FASCINATING RHYTHMS		
PART 8: FINDING YOUR WAY AROUND IN THE MUSIC		PART 9: READ AND PLAY RHYTHMS WITH TWO HANDS
PART 5: TIED NOTES	PART 6: MORE TIME SIGNATURES	PART 7: MIXED TIMING
PART 2: 8TH NOTES	PART 3: 16TH NOTES	PART 4: TRIPLETS
PART 1: PRECISION AND SPEED		
INTRODUCTORY LESSONS		

The parts in Book 3.

In Part 1, all our focus was on increasing the precision and speed of your playing. I deliberately avoided introducing anything new, such as new note types, while we worked on accuracy and speed.

This has built a firm foundation for what's coming next: an in-depth study of three new note types in Parts 2, 3 and 4.

Recap: The beat

Underlying all timing, is *the beat*.

We first came across the beat in Book 1.

Reminder: the **beat** is the regular pulsing of a piece of music.

Nearly all the music we are familiar with is based on a beat.

In **Book 1**, I compared the beat with a heartbeat:

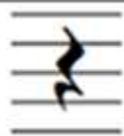
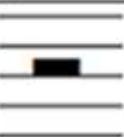
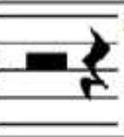
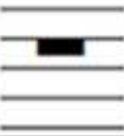
‘The beat is a bit like your heartbeat. You go about your life, doing all the things you do—riding your bicycle, going shopping, eating your dinner, watching a film, sleeping—and all the time, throughout these activities, your heart keeps beating regularly...

‘Like a heartbeat, the beat in music is regular and even, and it keeps on going regardless of whatever activities are happening.’

Create a beat now. Clap your hands, or tap on a table, or stamp your foot on the floor. Whatever you do, make sure you do it regularly, like the ticking of a clock.

Recap: Types of note and rest

In **Book 1**, we learned these 4 types of note and rest:

Number of beats	Note	Rest	American names	British names
1			quarter note quarter rest	crotchet crotchet rest
2			half note half rest	minim minim rest
3		 *	dotted half note	dotted minim
4			whole note whole rest	semibreve semibreve rest

* There is no dotted half rest in common use. A rest of 3 beats is normally shown by a combination, such as a half rest followed by a quarter rest.

All the tunes we played in *Books 1 and 2* used only these 4 types of note and rest. That is about to change!

Notice that the 'number of beats' for each of these notes is a whole number: 1, 2, 3 and 4. There are no fractions there. (A fraction is a number smaller than 1, such as 1/2 or 3/4.)

Recap: tools for mastering these note types

In Part 1, I gave you tools for increasing the accuracy and speed of your playing. First you learned to use the metronome, which will be the foundation for much of the work you'll do throughout Book 3.

Then I gave you my Speed-Up-Slowly practice method, and expanded on it to create the all-encompassing Learning Procedure.

By using those tools, you were able to play tunes such as this one accurately and at speed:

Camptown Races

The image shows a musical staff in 4/4 time. The first measure contains four quarter notes (C4, D4, E4, F4) with a '4' above the staff. The second measure contains two half notes (G4, A4) with a '2' above the staff. The third measure contains a quarter note (B4) followed by a dotted quarter note (C5). The fourth measure contains a quarter note (D5) followed by a dotted quarter note (E5). Below the staff, there are 16 upward-pointing arrows labeled 'ticks:'. Below the ticks, the beats are numbered 1 through 4 for each of the four measures.

There is a metronome tick for every note, helping us check that we are playing each note at exactly the right time.

So far so good.

Subdividing the beat

Things changed when you started Book 3. In lesson 1, you encountered the first notes that are shorter in duration than a beat.

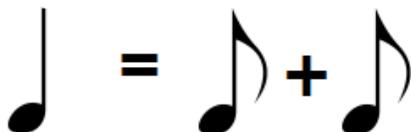
When we divide a beat into notes that are smaller than a beat, this is called 'subdividing the beat'.

Definition: subdividing the beat means writing or playing notes that are shorter than 1 beat in duration.

Definition: a subdivision is one part of a beat, after the beat is subdivided.

The simplest subdivision: the 8th note

The simplest example of subdividing the beat is dividing it into two 8th notes. Each 8th note is half a beat in duration:



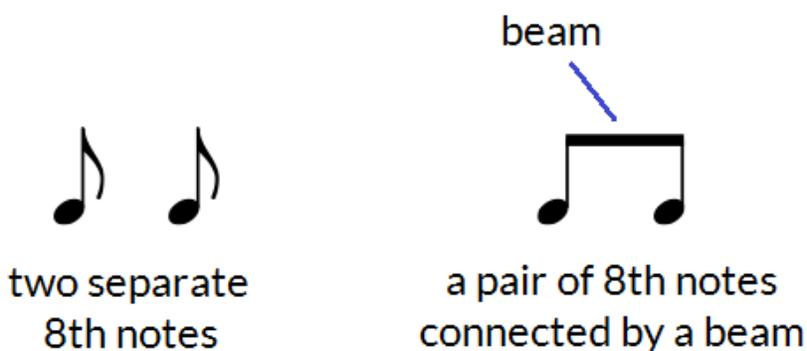
A quarter note (which usually represents a beat)
can be subdivided into two 8th notes. Each 8th note lasts for a half beat.

Here is how an 8th note looks when it is all on its own:



How a pair of 8th notes is printed

Back in Lesson 1, we learned that there are two ways of printing a pair of 8th notes that occur next to each other:



Two ways of printing a pair of 8th notes.

The challenge

Now let's consider a tune that has 8th notes, like Waltzing Matilda which we played in Lesson 1. We turn on the metronome to tick the beats:

Waltzing Matilda

ticks: ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑
the beats: 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

And here's the challenge. Some of the notes have a metronome tick helping us play the note exactly on time, *but the notes that are between the beats do not have a tick.*

these notes have a tick 😊

ticks: ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↑

these notes have no tick 😞

How are we ever to know whether we're playing the in-between notes accurately? And especially when we play them at speed?!

My answer is, by using my Break-the-Beat practice method. And that is the subject of this next lesson. I'll show you how this practice method works, and then we'll use it to play accurate 8th notes.



LESSON 15:

BREAK-THE-BEAT PRACTICE METHOD

MUSIC THEORY

BUILD YOUR KNOWLEDGE

As I just told you in the Introduction, the practice method I'm going to show you will enable you to play 8th notes accurately. This makes the difference between sounding like a professional and sounding like a beginner.

Here are the 3 steps of the Break-the-Beat practice method. You can just read this for now. You'll get plenty of practice in a moment.

The Break-the-Beat practice method

STEP 1: TICK THE BEAT

- a. In this step, you'll have your metronome ticking beats, but the music I'll give you to play includes 8th notes. You will do your best to play the music accurately in time with the ticks of the metronome. And that's a challenge, because there is no tick to help you time where to play the 8th notes. Here's an example:

metronome speed
50 BPM

ticks: ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑

the beats: 1 2 3 4

no tick to help us play the subdivided note accurately

STEP 2: TICK THE HALF BEAT

- a. In this step, you'll double the speed of your metronome so it is now ticking on every half beat. (That's why I call this method 'Break-the-Beat': because in this step we break the beat into two half-beats.) This measure now gets 8 ticks instead of 4. When you play the music again, you'll find there is now a tick on the subdivided note to help you play it accurately:

metronome speed
100 BPM

ticks: ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑

the beats: 1 2 3 4

this tick helps us play the subdivided note accurately

STEP 3: TICK THE BEAT AGAIN

- a. After using the metronome ticking the half beats to gain precision in your timing, turn it back to the original speed.

metronome speed
50 BPM

ticks: ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑

the beats: 1 2 3 4

now you'll find you can play the subdivided note accurately even though it has no tick

And guess what? You can now play the subdivided notes accurately without the metronome ticking the half beats!

Let's give it a try.

PRACTICAL

BUILD YOUR SKILL

Here's your first exercise.

Exercise 1: One subdivided quarter note

We're going to apply the Break-the-Beat practice method. I'll walk you through it step by step.

1 Tick the beat

- a. Set your metronome to 50 BPM to represent the beat.
- b. In this step, you'll have your metronome ticking beats, but the music I'm giving you to play includes a subdivided note. Do your best to play the music accurately in time with the ticks of the metronome. Play this now:

metronome speed
50 BPM

ticks:
↑ ↑ ↑ ↑

the beats:
1 2 3 4

no tick to help us
play the subdivided
note accurately

I know that was a challenge, with no tick to help you with the 8th notes.

How did you do?

2 Tick the half beat

- a. Double the speed of your metronome to 100 so it is now ticking on every half beat. This measure now gets 8 ticks instead of 4. When you play the music again, you'll find there is now a tick on the subdivided note to help you play it accurately:

metronome speed
100 BPM

ticks: ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑

the beats: 1 2 3 4

this tick helps us
play the subdivided
note accurately

- b. Repeat as needed until you can play it accurately and easily. You'll know the subdivided note is accurate when the tick seems to disappear as it is drowned out by the note you play. Of course, all the notes on the beats should also be at the same time as a tick.

3 Tick the beat again

- a. After using the metronome ticking the half beats to gain precision in your timing, turn it back to the original speed.

metronome speed
50 BPM

ticks: ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑

the beats: 1 2 3 4

now you'll find you can play the subdivided note accurately even though it has no tick

- b. Play it again, and you'll find you can now play the subdivided notes accurately without the help of a tick! End by playing accurately with the metronome ticking only the beats. This is like taking off the training wheels while learning to ride a bicycle. You can now play 8th notes accurately without the help of ticking the half beats.
- c. If you're not certain that your 8th notes are accurate, go back and forth between 100 BPM and 50 BPM. Keep doing that until you're playing accurately at both speeds. Doubling the metronome briefly like that is a trick you can use any time, to check the accuracy of your subdivided notes.

Exercise 2:

Two measures

Apply the Break-the-Beat practice method. I'll walk you through the steps.

1 Tick the beat

- a. Set your metronome to 50 BPM to represent the beat. Play the music below, making your timing of the 8th notes as accurate as you can.

metronome speed
50 BPM

ticks: ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑

the beats: 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

2 Tick the half beat

- Double the speed of your metronome to 100 so it is now ticking on every half beat.

metronome speed
100 BPM

ticks: ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑

the beats: 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

- Repeat as needed until you can play it accurately and easily.

3 Tick the beat again

- Turn the metronome back to the original speed of 50 to represent the beats, and play it again.

metronome speed
50 BPM

ticks: ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑

the beats: 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

- If you're not certain that your half-beat notes are accurate, go back and forth between 100 BPM and 50 BPM until you're playing accurately at both speeds.

Exercise 3:

Left hand, different pitches

Apply the 3 steps of the Break-the-Beat practice method, just as you did in the previous two exercises:

STEP 1: TICK THE BEAT

STEP 2: TICK THE HALF BEAT

STEP 3: TICK THE BEAT AGAIN



Exercise 4:

Right hand, different pitches

Apply the Break-the-Beat practice method.



Tune 1:

A tune by Mozart

A duet (song for two singers) from Mozart's opera Don Giovanni. The Italian title means 'There we will give each other our hands'.

Apply the Break-the-Beat practice method.

La Ci Darem la Mano



Tune 2:

A nostalgic song

American composer Thomas Bayly wrote this song which expresses a longing for times gone by. It was written in 1833 and became very popular in its time, and was much recorded in the following century.

Apply the Break-the-Beat practice method.

Long Long Ago



Very well done.